Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

# Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 TEL AV 03698 172033Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 NEAE-00 CIAE-00
DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 PA-01
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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2017
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
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AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
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AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
USMISSION SINAI
USMISSION USUN NY

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 3698

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, MOPS, LE, IS
SUBJECT: IMPLICATIONS OF THE ISRAELI INCURSION IN LEBANON

1. SUMMARY: THE SURGE OF PATRIOTISM AND PRIDE ASSOCIATED WITH THE IDF MOVEMENT INTO SOUTHERN LEBANON HAS MOMENTARILY DISTRACTED THE ISRAELI PUBLIC AND THE CABINET FROM THE DIVISIVE ISSUES ON WHICH ATTENTION WAS CENTERED A WEEK AGO. ISRAELIS ANTICIPATED THAT THE TERRORIST ATTACK AND THEIR RESPONSE WOULD GENERATE GREAT INTERNATIONAL SYMPATHY FOR ISRAELI SECURITY CONCERNS AS THEY RELATE TO THE PEACE PRO-
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PAGE 02 TEL AV 03698 172033Z

CESS, AND THEY PROBABLY WILL BE PUZZLED AND ANGRY TO FIND THAT THIS IS NOT THE CASE. QUESTIONS ARE BEGINNING TO BE HEARD REGARDING WHEN AND UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS THE IDF SHOULD WITHDRAW FROM LEBANESE TERRITORY. THE GOI PROBABLY UNDERESTIMATES EGYPTIAN AND WORLD TOLERANCE FOR A LENGTHY OCCUPATION AND OVERESTIMATES THE DEGREE TO WHICH OTHERS WILL NOW ACCEPT ISRAELI HARDLINE POSITIONS ON PALESTINIAN

Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

ISSUES.

2. THE DOMESTIC SITUATION. THE STRIKE INTO SOUTHERN
LEBANON HAS HAD A UNIFYING EFFECT ON THE ISRAELI PUBLIC
FOR THE SHORT TERM AND HAS DISTRACTED PUBLIC ATTENTION
FROM THE MANY DIVISIVE ISSUES BEING DISCUSSED A WEEK AGO.
PUBLIC OPINION IS SOLIDLY BEHIND THE JUSTIFICATION FOR THE
IDF ACTION, THE APPROPRIATENESS OF THE ISRAELI RESPONSE AND
THE SKILL WITH WHICH IT WAS CARRIED OUT. THERE IS NATIONAL
PRIDE IN SUCH DISPLAYS OF ISRAEL'S MILITARY MIGHT ALTHOUGH
THE DEFENSE FORCES WILL BE FACING SOME ROUGH QUESTIONS
IN THE WEEKS AHEAD CONCERNING THE ABILITY OF THE TERRORISTS
TO PENETRATE ISRAELI DEFENSES AND THE POLICE/MILITARY RESPONSE
TO LAST SATURDAY'S ATTACK. ON BALANCE, HOWEVER, AS WE HAVE PREV-
IOUSLY REPORTED, THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT IS STRONGER THAN IT WAS A
WEEK AGO.

4. THE EXTERNAL EQUATION. THE INTERNATIONAL SYMPATHY
WHICH WAS GENERATED FRO ISRAEL AS A RESULT OF THE TERRORIST
ATTACK HAS PROBABLY BEEN MORE THAN OFFSET BY ISRAELI MILI-
TARY ACTIVITIES IN LEBANON. BASED ON MEDIA AND DIPLOMATIC
REACTIONS AVAILABLE TO US, IT WOULD SEEM THAT THE BALANCE
OF INTERNATIONAL OPINION IS THAT THE ISRAELI RESPONSE WAS
EXCESSIVE. HOWEVER, ISRAELIS DO NOT SEE IT THAT WAY;
THE PICTURE OF SUBSTANTIAL CIVILIAN CASUALTIES IN LEBANON
THAT THE OUTSIDE WORLD SEEMS TO BE GETTING IS AT GREAT
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VARIANCE WITH THE GOI AND ISRAELI PUBLIC BELIEF THAT ALMOST
ALL CASUALTIES HAVE BEEN PALESTINIAN MILITARY. PRIME MIN-
ISTER BEGIN AND HIS COLLEAGUES ARE AWARE THAT AN ADDITIONAL
PROBLEM WILL ARISE CONCERNING THE USE OF US EQUIPMENT
IN LEBANON. THEY DO NOT YET APPEAR TO BE OVERLY CONCERNED ABOUT
IT, HOWEVER, AND DO NOT ACCPET THE OTHER CRITICISMS FROM
THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AS VALID.

4. THE PURPOSE OF THE INCURSION. THE ACCEPTED RATIONALE
HERE FOR THE MOVE INTO SOUTHERN LEBANON WAS SELF-DEFENSE
--I.E., TO REMOVE THE PLO THREAT TO ISRAEL'S SECURITY ALONG
THE NORTHERN BORDER: IT IS NOT DENIED, OF COURSE, THAT DEMANDS
FOR RETALITATION WERE SATISFIED AT THE SAME TIME. MOST
ISRAELIS ARE AWARE THAT REMOVAL OF THE PALESTINIANS FROM
SOUTHERN LEBANON WILL NOT PROVIDE COMPLETE PROTECTION AGAINST
TERRORIST ATTACKS OF THE MARCH 11TH TYPE (WHICH WAS LAUNCHED
FROM CENTRAL LEBANON). THEY DO BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THEY ARE
ENTITLED TO BETTER SECURITY IN THE NORTH AND THEY FAIL TO
SEE HOW THIS IS NOT SELF-EVIDENT TO THE REST OF THE WORLD.
THE OTHER DIVIDEND OF THE INCURSION IS THAT IT HELPS THE
CHRISTIAN FORCES IN THE AREA--A SOURCE OF CONTINUING
GOI CONCERN.

Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

5. SYRIA. A FACTOR AGAINST ISRAELI OPERATIONS OF THIS NATURE
PREVIOUSLY WAS THE ARGUMENT THAT NO ISRAELI ACTION SHOULD
BE DIRECTED AT SYRIA OR AT SYRIAN CLIENTS AS LONG AS THE
POSSIBILITY EXISTED THAT SYRIA COULD BE BROUGHT INTO ANY
PEACE NEGOTIATIONS. GIVEN THE SYRIAN REACTION TO THE SADAT
INITIATIVE THAT RESTRAINT NO LONGER EXISTS. IN A SIMI-
LAR VEIN, WE ENCOUNTER THE ISRAELI ARGUMENT THAT IF WE HAD
ALLOWED THEM TO GO INTO SOUTH LEBANON LAST FALL, THE RECENT
TERRORIST ATTACK MIGHT HAVE BEEN AVOIDED. (SIC) THEY HAVE ALWAYS
ADMITTED THAT THEIR INSISTENCE ON NOT HAVING THE SYRIAN
ARMY IN THE SOUTH MEANT THAT THE PALESTINIANS WERE MORE
OR LESS FREE TO OPERATE UNRESTRICTED; HOWEVER, THEY ARGUED
THIS WAS A LESSER EVIL AND THAT THEY COULD AND WOULD DEAL
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PAGE 04 TEL AV 03698 172033Z

WITH THE PALESTINIANS, IF NECESSARY (AS THEY ARE NOW DOING).

6. WHAT NEXT? THE GOI HAS DELCARED THAT ISRAEL HAS NO
DESIRE TO IMPINGE UPON LEBANESE SOVEREIGNTY. ISRAELIS
ACCEPT THIS. THERE ARE DIFFERENT VIEWS EMERGING HOW-
EVER, ON WHEN AND UNDER WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES THE IDF SHOULD
WITHDRAW. SOME ARGUE THAT THE IDF SHOULD STAND FAST UNTIL
SOME MEANS CAN BE WORKED OUT WHICH WILL PREVENT PALESTINIANS
FROM RETURNING TO THE BORDER AREA. IT IS RECOGNIZED THAT
ARRANGING THIS WILL BE DIFFICULT AND TIME CONSUMING. A
SMALLER, BUT NOT INSIGNIFICANT, GROUP IS CONVINCED THAT
THE IDF MUST EVACUATE LEBANESE TERRITORY QUICKLY AS SOON
AS THE MILITARY OBJECTIVES ARE ACHIEVED TO COUNTER THE
GRWOING SUSPICIONS OF ISRAELI TERRITORIAL EXPANSION.

7. THE IMPACT ON PEACE. THERE IS SOME SATISFACTION HERE
THAT THE EGYPTIANS HAVE NOT RENOUNCED THE PEACE PROCESS
BECAUSE OF THE SOUTHERN LEBANON SITUATION. THE GOI PROBABLY
CALCULATED THIS RISK CORRECTLY, BUT IT PROBABLY IS UNDER-
ESTIMATING HOW LONG ISRAEL CAN HANG ON IN SOUTHERN LEBANON
WITHOUT DAMAGING MORE SERIOUSLY THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS.
A MORE IMPORTANT GOI MISPERCEPTION IS THAT THE EVENTS OF THE
LAST WEEK WILL REDUCE PRESSURE ON ISRAEL FOR WITHDRAWAL
"ON ALL FRONTS" AND FOR GREATER FLEXIBILITY ON THE RESOLU-
TION OF THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE.
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20 Mar 2014
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